

DIGITAL CAMERAS

INTRODUCTION

Digital cameras are turning us into a nation of photography enthusiasts. Rather than picking up dull, badly composed and poorly exposed shots from the chemist and wondering what went wrong, you can now take a picture, instantly see how successful it is and, if necessary, have another go. This is the best photographic education you could hope for. The instant feedback and recyclable nature of digital allows us to experiment with creative photographic techniques.

If your compact digital camera has opened your eyes to the artistic side of photography, perhaps it's time you rewarded yourself with a more capable camera. We've gathered the leading models aimed at amateur enthusiasts, bridging the gap between top-of-the-range compact cameras, which have never been so capable, and entry-level digital SLRs, which have never been so affordable. If you're itching to take your photography to the next level, we're here to make sure you do it in style.

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You're a better photographer than you were five years ago, and you deserve a better camera. We test 12 affordable models with the quality to help you give it your best shot

SHOOT TO THRILL

Choosing a... Digital camera

If you're serious about photography and your budget is between £400 and £500, you have an important decision to make. Do you want an entry-level digital SLR or a high-end fixed-lens digital camera? Both have their merits, so you need to consider what you can expect from each type.

LIGHT FANTASTIC

The most obvious benefit of an SLR camera is that light passing through the lens is sent straight to the optical viewfinder. This provides a large, detailed preview of a scene, complete with focus and zoom settings. The difference between this through-the-lens (known as TTL) facility and an LCD screen preview is huge. After all, a 235,000-pixel screen can't hope to do justice to an 8-megapixel image. Manual focus is delightfully easy on a digital SLR, whereas on a fixed-lens camera it's practically impossible to achieve without some kind of workaround.

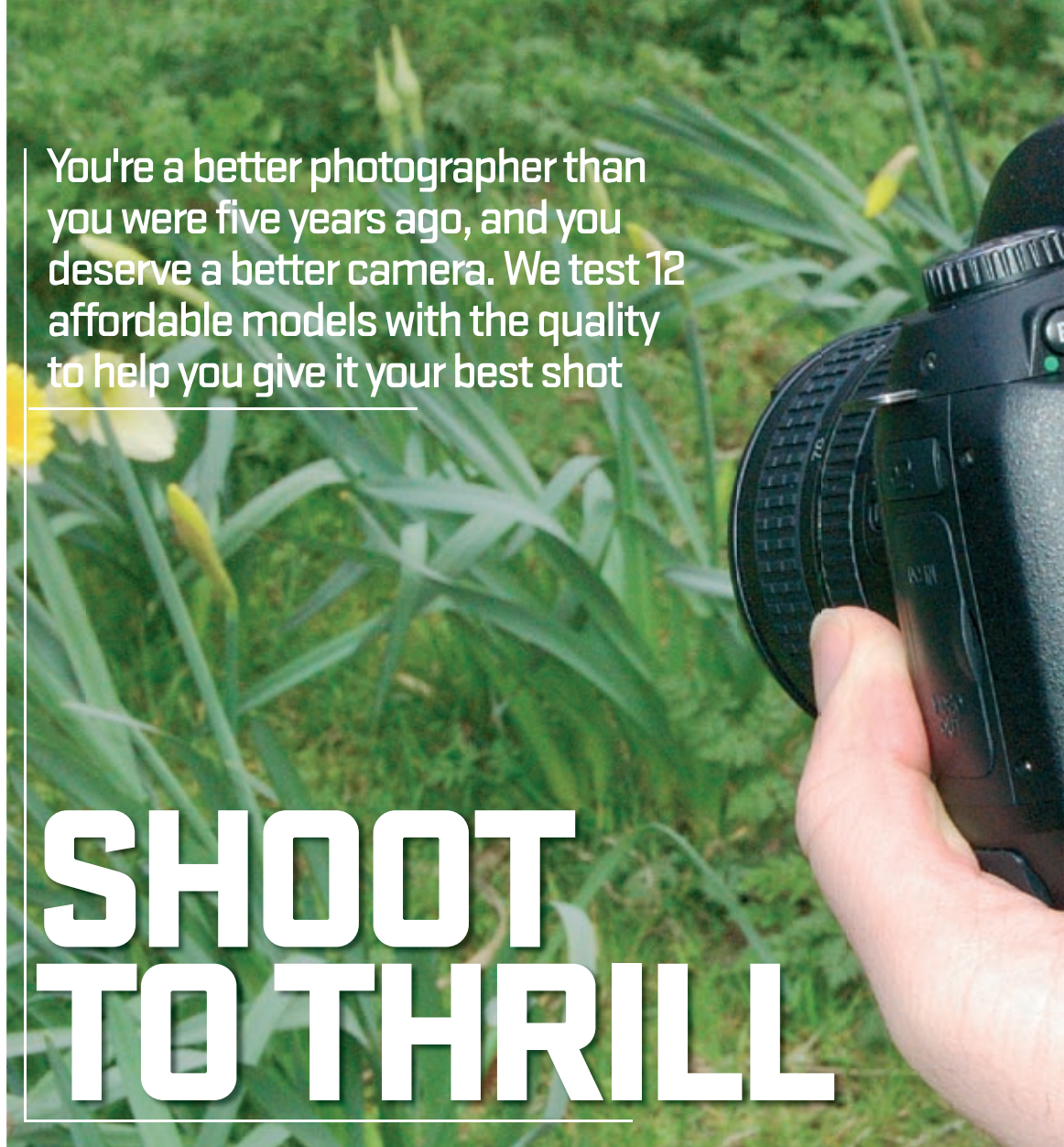
Digital SLRs also tend to be more responsive. Startup is often instantaneous, and in manual focus mode you usually won't experience any kind of perceptible gap between pushing the shutter and taking a picture.

Digital SLRs invariably suffer less from image noise, thanks to the use of larger sensors. The difference is most noticeable at high ISO settings, as these involve capturing less light and boosting the brightness digitally. In practice, most fixed-lens digital cameras can capture images without intrusive noise at ISO speeds of 100 or 200. Digital SLRs, however, often reach ISO 800 or 1,600 while maintaining low noise. This allows the user to increase the shutter speed and thus reduce blur from camera shake or fast-moving subjects.

Another inherent benefit of digital SLRs is the option to change lenses. Budget DSLR kits come with fairly basic lenses, but when your finances allow, you can add specialist lenses for macro, telephoto, super wide angle and all sorts of other specialist functions. Canon makes nearly 100 different lenses that can be fitted to its EOS 350D.

COMPACT VISION

But £500 non-SLR digital cameras have plenty to offer, too. Their lenses are far more capable than a budget DSLR's, with huge zoom ranges and more intimate macro functions. Many also have optical image stabilisation, enabling you to take long-range telephoto





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shots without blur. An image stabiliser is useful in low light, as it allows you to use longer shutter speeds to capture more light without blur.

Previews on an LCD screen have their advantages. They don't have the detail of an optical viewfinder, but they can reveal the camera's exposure and white balance settings before the shot is taken. Because an SLR camera directs light from the lens straight to the optical viewfinder, light doesn't hit the sensor until you take a picture. As a result, live previews on a DSLR's screen aren't usually possible, although Olympus has found a way around this in its E-330. DSLRs can't record video files, whereas all the fixed-lens cameras on test can record video at 640x480 resolution and 30fps.

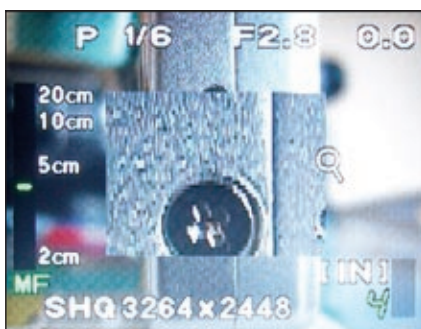
Non-SLR digital cameras don't get much better than those in this group, and many of them are adorned with superb controls and huge, high-resolution screens. These areas are sometimes stripped back when designing a budget DSLR.

PICKING A WINNER

Most of the criteria for a good digital camera apply to SLR and fixed-lens models. As always, image quality is paramount. We paid attention to sharpness and detail, image noise, flash performance and problems such as blooming and purple fringing, and we also examined how easy it was to use manual settings to get the pictures we wanted to achieve.

Enthusiasts' cameras are unlikely to spend much time in full automatic mode, but we wouldn't want a camera that we had to battle with to get the desired results. With this in mind, we looked for an exhaustive set of options, an efficient set of physical controls with which to access them and clear feedback as to what effect they would have.

Performance is just as important. A camera that starts up quickly and is fast to use can help you to get the pictures you want, and it's important to have a battery that's good enough for a whole day's shooting if need be. Handling comfort can have the same effect, although this is one area in which all the cameras in the group scored highly.



▲ Focusing a compact camera manually is tricky, but a zoomed preview screen can help

How we test Digital cameras

We subjected all the cameras to a range of controlled photographic tests to assess their performance in various lighting conditions. We performed our tests using both automatic settings and the camera's manual controls. Skin tones are particularly revealing of slight colour inaccuracies, so we photographed people in direct sunlight, outdoors on an overcast day, in artificial light without the flash and using the flash at close, medium and long range. We repeated a number of shots at

each ISO speed for each camera to test for image noise, and experimented with focus and metering modes and depth of field effects.

Performance was tested by capturing as many shots as the cameras would allow in 30 seconds with and without flash, in normal and continuous drive modes, and using auto focus and manual focus. Battery life was tested using a mechanical arm that takes a picture every 30 seconds with the screen switched on for the duration of the test.

CANON PowerShot S2 IS

★★★★★

£282 inc VAT



We gave the S2 IS a five-star review in *What's New, Shopper* September 2005, so how has it aged? Its 5-megapixel sensor is now virtually entry-level, but Canon has balanced this by knocking off £50.

It doesn't lack anything in its zoom range, and optical image stabilisation helps shots stay sharp at the full 12x telephoto setting. It's also seriously quick, with just over a second between shots in standard operation and a 2.3fps continuous mode.

The S2 IS is the lightest and smallest camera on test, but it's still comfortable to hold and the buttons are well laid out. The manual options are not particularly accessible, with few dedicated buttons and no command dials. As such, most adjustments are made via menus and the four-way pad. Manual exposure adjustments are easy and reflected accurately on the preview image's brightness. A picture-in-picture digital zoom helps with manual focusing. However, the lack of a lens ring and the low resolution of the screen mean it's still fiddly and imprecise.

Image quality compares well to other 5-megapixel cameras and colour accuracy is good, but detail was distinctly lacking. Pictures were smaller than the competition's and appeared softer when viewed up close and complex subjects looked messy. Image noise was a problem at ISO 200 and ISO 400 shots were a write-off.

If £300 is your budget and you want to take creative shots but not big prints, the S2 is still a contender. But Panasonic's FZ30 is worth the extra.

SUMMARY

- ✓ Fast
- ✓ Inexpensive
- ✗ Inaccessible manual controls

DIGITAL COMPACT CAMERA
5 million pixels (2,592x1,944), 12x zoom (36-432mm), SD slot (16MB SD card), 4x AA batteries
PART CODE 9883A007AA
SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk
DETAILS www.canon.co.uk

FUJIFILM FinePix S9500 Zoom

★★★★

£361 inc VAT



The S9500 looks like a DSLR camera, as its flash is in a raised extension above the lens. With lens rings for zoom and focus and ISO speeds up to 1,600, it tries hard to behave like one, too.

Manual focus benefits from a zoomed picture-in-picture that's activated at the user's discretion. But even with the high-resolution electronic viewfinder, accurate focusing is fiddly. The auto-focus often takes around a second in normal conditions and as long as five seconds at extreme telephoto settings. Sometimes it gives up trying and takes an out-of-focus picture. The camera can take a shot within a second of startup and at one-second intervals, but this levels off to a shot every 1½ seconds when using xD cards and every two seconds with CompactFlash.

The S9500 produced its best image quality in a still-life composition under studio lighting. At other times, images appeared slightly softer than from many of the 8-megapixel cameras. We noticed some blooming in high-contrast pictures, where bright parts of the image bled into darker parts. Image noise was minimal at ISO 400, but aggressive noise reduction was evident at ISO 800, and ISO 1,600 pictures were a mess.

Despite its faults, the S9500 is a feature-packed camera that's capable of great results. Ultimately, though, it tries too hard to imitate the talents of a DSLR and neglects the areas in which a fixed-lens super-zoom camera can excel.

SUMMARY

- ✓ Low noise for a non-SLR
- ✗ Frustrating telephoto settings
- ✗ Slow auto-focus

DIGITAL COMPACT CAMERA
9.1 million pixels (3,488x2,616), 10.7x zoom (28-300mm), CompactFlash and xD slots (16MB xD card), 4x AA batteries
PART CODE N077070A
SUPPLIER www.savastore.com
DETAILS www.fujifilm.co.uk

KODAK Easyshare P880

★★★

£317 inc VAT



The P880 is a little taller and skinnier than most of the other cameras here. It has a relatively meagre 5.8x zoom, but the extra height provides room for a 2½" LCD screen and a great number of single-function buttons.

There are lens rings for zoom and manual focus and the focus ring is quite easy to use, with a zoomed picture-in-picture displayed onscreen. A single dial controls aperture, shutter speed and exposure compensation, but switching its mode requires more button pushes it should.

Battery life is excellent, producing 491 shots from a single charge. However, this might be partly because the camera's processor is under-specified. The P880 managed to take a picture every two seconds, but after nine shots a message appeared saying "Processing". This rendered the camera inoperable for around 20 seconds. Our SD card was fast enough to record the data, so we assume the chip used to process and compress shots was causing the bottleneck. Continuous mode suffered a similar problem. Auto-focus is slow, too, taking at least a second and often much longer to find its target.

Image quality was poor in the face of such stiff competition. Images didn't display the detail we'd expect from an 8-megapixel camera, noise was evident at ISO 200 and tricky lighting conditions tended to produce flawed images on automatic settings. The P880 is cheaper than most cameras here, but Canon's S2 IS costs less still and is a better camera.

SUMMARY

- ✓ Lots of physical controls
- ✗ Disappointing image quality
- ✗ Slow operation, short zoom

DIGITAL COMPACT CAMERA
8 million pixels (3,264x2,448), 5.8x zoom (24-140mm), SD/MMC slot (30MB internal), 3.7V, 1,800mAh li-ion battery
PART CODE 8079972
SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk
DETAILS www.kodak.co.uk

NIKON CoolPix 8800

★★★

£556 inc VAT



Nikon's flagship fixed-lens digital camera has an 8-megapixel sensor, 10x zoom with optical image stabilisation and a magnesium alloy body.

There are three screens: a high-resolution electronic viewfinder (EVF), a backlit passive LCD showing camera settings and the usual colour LCD. The LCD isn't that big, but it can rotate 180° for self-portraits.

The command dial makes shutter speed and aperture adjustments quick, but nearly everything else about using the 8800 is painfully slow. Basic settings such as ISO speed are buried deep within the menu, which is poorly laid out and slow to navigate. Manual focus is close to hand, but doesn't benefit from any visual feedback other than the EVF and screen images, which don't provide nearly enough detail for accurate focusing. This is unfortunate because the auto-focus isn't reliable.

When its auto-focus was on target, the 8800 produced some stunningly detailed photographs, and the image stabilisation proved its worth at extreme telephoto settings. However, at least half the shots we took were soft for one reason or another. The flash produced cold colours and artificial light gave a strong red cast, though the preview often looked fine. Both can be rectified with the white balance presets, but only if you waded through the menu to find them. Worst of all, image noise was evident at ISO settings as low as 100. At this price, these problems are a serious disappointment.

SUMMARY

- ✓ Excellent detail
- ✗ Image noise
- ✗ Awkward and slow

DIGITAL COMPACT CAMERA
8 million pixels (3,264x2,448), 10x zoom (35-350mm), CompactFlash, 7.4V, 1100mAh li-ion battery
PART CODE VAA280BA
SUPPLIER www.microwarehouse.co.uk
DETAILS www.nikon.co.uk

PANASONIC DMC-FZ30

★★★★★

£359 inc VAT



Manual focusing is far easier on the FZ30 than on any other non-SLR camera we've seen. The dedicated lens ring is responsive and precise, while the high-resolution LCD and viewfinder screens display a zoomed central area of the image while focusing. A second lens ring makes zooming equally satisfying. There are two command dials for aperture and shutter speed.

The camera is reasonably quick, capturing pictures every two seconds. Auto-focus accounts for around half of this time, so switching to manual focus reduces the gap to one second. Continuous mode focuses just once before capturing indefinitely at 1.67fps.

Our image tests revealed flattering yet natural colours in all lights, while the level of detail captured could be matched only by Canon's EOS 350D DSLR. The crisp focus and optical image stabilisation produced images leagues ahead of the competition at telephoto zoom settings and when using long shutter times. Unfortunately, while shots taken at ISO 200 and 400 weren't that noisy, they had a slightly smudged, painted appearance. This is usually a side effect of noise reduction processing, but the problem wasn't as noticeable as on other Panasonic cameras we've seen.

The DMC-FZ30 is almost as pleasant to use as a DSLR and this is quite an achievement. The only downside we discovered is that its best performance is limited to slow ISO speeds, making it less suited to low-light and action photography.



SUMMARY

- ✓ Superb handling
- ✓ Excellent image quality
- ✗ Noise reduction artefacts

DIGITAL COMPACT CAMERA
8 million pixels (3,264x2,448), 12x zoom (35-420mm), SD/MMC slot (16MB SD card), 7.2V, 710mAh li-ion battery
PART CODE DMCFZ30EG
SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk
DETAILS www.panasonic.co.uk

SAMSUNG Pro815

★★★★★

£447 inc VAT



This camera is enormous, but not without good reason: the 15x zoom range and 3½" LCD screen set new records for digital cameras.

So too does the battery capacity. It lasted for 532 shots in our test. If you need a rest from the LCD, there's an electronic viewfinder with a similarly high resolution. Even the top-mounted colour screen normally used to display camera settings can be pressed into preview duties.

Physical controls are equally abundant, with three lens rings for zoom, focus and exposure compensation, two command dials for aperture and shutter speed, and dedicated buttons for just about everything else. Manual exposure is well implemented, with clear onscreen feedback. Unfortunately, the only way to achieve sharp manual focus is to cycle through the digital zoom settings, which isn't particularly quick or intuitive.

The camera rarely excelled or embarrassed itself in image-quality tests. Dependable performance in tricky lighting conditions is not to be sniffed at, though image noise was intrusive at ISO 400. The zoom range makes for a highly versatile camera, stretching from a wide-angle 28mm to the same 420mm focal length offered by Panasonic. However, Samsung's lack of image stabilisation means you'll need very bright conditions or a tripod to use the 420mm focal length.

The Pro815 is great fun to use, but it's almost too audacious. It's the monster truck in a Lab test of four-wheel drives: fun in theory, but you might feel self-conscious using it.

SUMMARY

- ✓ Massive screen and zoom
- ✓ Loads of controls
- ✗ Big and heavy

DIGITAL COMPACT CAMERA
8 million pixels (3,264x2,448), 15x zoom (28-420mm), CompactFlash slot (64MB card), 7.4V, 1900mAh li-ion battery
PART CODE 8801089758514
SUPPLIER <http://uk.insight.com>
DETAILS www.samsungcamera.co.uk

CANON EOS 350D

★★★★★

£496 inc VAT



The EOS 350D's performance is excellent, capturing two shots a second for 20 shots, after which our MicroDrive started to slow things down. Even with the flash enabled, the 350D can shoot a picture every second. The relatively low-capacity battery managed to survive for 651 shots on a single charge.

The camera's controls are straightforward and responsive. A single command dial controls aperture, shutter speed and exposure compensation, but the button to toggle between them isn't ideally placed, being right under the nose when looking through the viewfinder. The menu navigation buttons double as short cuts to ISO, auto-focus, white balance and metering modes, but this means they stop being short cuts when the menu is open. Spot focusing is well implemented, but spot metering is absent, as is exposure lock. Exposure compensation goes only to +/-2 EV, although this is plenty for most situations.

The 350D produced the best image quality in this test. Automatic settings usually gave excellent exposures, though the white balance sometimes needed a little help. Best of all was the incredibly sharp detail, revealing subtle skin textures that other cameras glossed over. Noise was minimal at high ISO settings, with usable results at ISO 1,600. Shots taken at high ISO speeds weren't quite as detailed.

This is an extremely impressive camera, especially at this price.



SUMMARY

- ✓ Exceptional image quality
- ✓ Fast performance
- ✗ Minor control issues

DIGITAL SLR CAMERA 8.0 million pixels (3,456x2,304), 3x zoom (18-55mm), CompactFlash slot, 7.4V, 720mAh li-ion battery
PART CODE 02108014AA
SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk
DETAILS www.canon.co.uk

NIKON D50 Kit

★★★★★

£423 inc VAT



The D50 is the most affordable digital SLR by a fair margin, but you wouldn't guess this from using it or seeing the quality of the results.

It has a lot in common with Nikon's pricier D70s, with a largely similar set of controls and a 6-megapixel CCD. There's only one command dial, but this is put to good use, giving quick access to a wide variety of functions when used in conjunction with the various buttons. The camera didn't live up to its quoted 2.5fps continuous mode at top image quality, but it managed a sustained 1.5fps, or 1fps with the flash enabled. Auto-focus was quick and reliable.

Despite the cosmetic similarities with the D70s, image quality wasn't on a par. The D50's photos weren't as sharp as the D70s's, although the difference was fairly subtle. It also fared less well under artificial light, with a red cast to pictures when using the automatic white balance setting. Colours weren't neutral in natural light, either, but the D50 appears to be tuned to produce subjectively pleasing colours. Skin tones were warm and flattering, while bright colours were vibrant without becoming oversaturated and losing detail. The D50's high-ISO performance was in a different league to the D70s and every other camera here. Image noise was barely perceptible, making the D50 suited to low-light photography.

The Canon 350D's superior image quality makes it worth the extra expense, but the D50 performs better at high ISO settings.

SUMMARY

- ✓ Flattering colours
- ✓ Great high-ISO performance
- ✗ Fussy auto-focus

DIGITAL SLR CAMERA 6.1 million pixels (3,008x2,000), 3x zoom (18-55mm), SD slot, 7.4V, 1,400mAh li-ion battery
PART CODE D50SKIT1
SUPPLIER www.savastore.com
DETAILS www.nikon.co.uk

NIKON D70s Kit

★★★★

£699 inc VAT



In some respects the D70s is in a different league to the other digital SLRs on test. It's the only one with two command dials, giving direct access to shutter speed and aperture in manual exposure mode. Its lens has a greater zoom range and a clear readout of focus distance in feet and metres. Its continuous mode is impressively fast at 3fps, although we found the Canon EOS 350D to be even faster. All the DSLRs in this Labs test have plastic rather than metal bodies, and all seem sturdy, but the D70s feels significantly more robust than the rest.

In other ways, though, the D70s blends in with the more affordable alternatives. A few extra physical controls and a backlight for the passive LCD screen make it easier to use than the D50, but in practice the difference is negligible; both cameras are extremely quick and easy to use. Image quality was average compared to the other DSLRs. It beat the D50 for sharpness and detail, but its 6-megapixel CCD couldn't quite keep up with the Canon 350D and its 8-megapixel sensor. We also found it had a tendency to underexpose shots. At least this habit was reasonably predictable and easy to compensate for. There was little evidence of image noise, but more than with the D50. We'd avoid using ISO 1,600 except as a last resort.

The D70s is arguably the most capable camera on test, with the best bundled lens, superb detail and fast, straightforward controls. But it doesn't go far enough to justify its high price compared to the Canon EOS 350D.

SUMMARY

- ✓ Excellent lens included
- ✓ Superb controls
- ✗ Expensive

DIGITAL SLR CAMERA 6.1 million pixels (3,008x2,000), 3.8x zoom (18-70mm), CompactFlash slot, 7.4V, 1,500mAh li-ion battery
PART CODE D70SKIT1
SUPPLIER www.savastore.com
DETAILS www.nikon.co.uk

OLYMPUS E-330

★★

£741 inc VAT



The E-330 is the first and only digital SLR camera that can display a live preview of compositions. This is normally impossible because light entering the lens is sent to the optical viewfinder rather than the sensor. However, the E-330 has a second sensor in its viewfinder chamber just for previews, with incoming light split between this and the viewfinder. The side effect is that the optical viewfinder is a little darker than usual, although we had to look for the difference to notice it.

Being able to preview exposure and white balance settings on a digital SLR's screen is an attractive idea, but we were disappointed to find that changing these settings had no effect on the LCD's preview image. At least the onscreen previews are useful when shooting at an awkward angle.

Rather than using a CMOS or CCD sensor, Olympus uses what it calls a Live MOS, which apparently offers comparable quality to a CCD but with around half the power requirements. The E-330's battery life is no better than average for a digital SLR, though, producing 496 shots in our test.

Otherwise, the E-330 has much in common with the E-500. Its controls are quick and easy to access, but it performed slowly and its focus ring felt woolly. Image quality was decent, but not what we'd expect from a £750 camera, with a tendency to underexpose shots and less detail than the Canon 350D managed to capture.

The live preview system is an interesting innovation, but it doesn't justify spending this much on an otherwise fairly pedestrian camera.

SUMMARY

- ✓ Live previews on LCD screen
- ✗ Slow performance
- ✗ Overpriced

DIGITAL SLR CAMERA 7.5 million pixels (3,136x2,352), 3.2x zoom (14-45mm), CompactFlash and xD slots, 7.2V, 1,500mAh li-ion battery
PART CODE 006013
SUPPLIER www.morecomputers.co.uk
DETAILS www.olympus.co.uk

OLYMPUS E-500

★★★★

£518 inc VAT



The E-500 seems more modern than the Canon and Nikon digital SLRs with its high-resolution 2½" LCD screen. However, this is the only screen you get. Olympus has designed an elegant control system based around the LCD screen with various ways to access commonly used settings. This makes it easy to pick up and start using the camera.

The 8-megapixel sensor has a 4:3 aspect ratio rather than the 3:2 used in most SLR cameras. Annoyingly, Olympus has made the optical viewfinder narrower rather than taller, providing a smaller view that makes manual focusing harder. It doesn't help that the focus ring is electrically linked to focus, so focusing the lens manually feels imprecise.

The camera gives its insides a blast of ultrasound on startup to dislodge any dust. This is a great idea, though we stopped short of deliberately filling it with dirt to test this feature. The downside is that the process adds around three seconds to the camera startup. It's not particularly fast at other times, capturing just 10 shots to xD card or 14 to MicroDrive in 30 seconds. Its battery life is excellent, though, giving 917 shots at 30-second intervals from a single charge.

Image quality gave little cause for concern, but the E-500 didn't excel compared to the Canon and Nikon DSLRs. Noise was barely perceptible at ISO 800 and the automatic exposure handled lighting conditions well, but images weren't quite as sharp as those from the Canon 350D or Nikon D70s.

SUMMARY

- ✓ Long battery life
- ✗ Slow performance
- ✗ Manual focus could be easier

DIGITAL SLR CAMERA 8.0 million pixels (3,264x2,448), 3.2x zoom (14-45mm), CompactFlash and xD slots, 7.2V, 1,500mAh li-ion battery
PART CODE 004255
SUPPLIER www.morecomputers.co.uk
DETAILS www.olympus.co.uk

PENTAX *ist DL Kit

★★★★

£529 inc VAT



Pentax's digital SLR looks businesslike and robust, but a few parts of its design reveal that it is a budget DSLR. It's powered by four AA batteries and rechargeable cells aren't supplied. It refused to work with a fresh set of Duracell Plus batteries.

Its controls are basic, too, with few dedicated buttons for specific functions. Even the flash mode is accessible only via the menu. Fortunately, Pentax's tried-and-tested menu system is quick to navigate, with a function button that turns the cursor keys into short cuts for flash, drive mode, white balance and ISO settings. A passive LCD screen on top of the camera displays the camera's main settings at all times.

Startup isn't quite instantaneous, with a second between flicking the switch and taking a picture. Auto-focus could be quicker, and it tends to get confused when the focus area is set to Centre. Otherwise, performance is acceptable, and it managed a sustained one picture per second.

The *ist DL produced stunningly sharp images in tests, although the level of detail captured wasn't a match for the 8-megapixel Canon 350D. It also manages strong contrast without blowing out highlights or flattening shadows. Images were practically noise-free at ISO 800 and ISO 1,600 is usable. ISO 3,200 is available, too. Colour accuracy was often excellent, although it frequently needed help.

This is a decent camera, but both the Nikon D50 and Canon 350D produce better images and cost less.

SUMMARY

- ✓ Sharp detail
- ✗ Few dedicated controls
- ✗ Unreliable auto exposure

DIGITAL SLR CAMERA 6.1 million pixels (3,008x2,008), 3x zoom (18-55mm), SD slot, 4x AA batteries
PART CODE 18428
SUPPLIER www.empiredirect.co.uk
DETAILS www.pentax.co.uk

Compact Cameras

MANUFACTURER		CANON	FUJIFILM	KODAK	NIKON	PANASONIC	SAMSUNG
Model		PowerShot S2 IS	FinePix S9500 Zoom	Easyshare P880	CoolPix 8800	DMC-FZ30	Pro815
Rating		★★★★	★★★	★★	★★	★★★★	★★★★
Effective number of pixels		5 million	9.1 million	8 million	8 million	8 million	8 million
Maximum image resolution		2,592x1,944	3,488x2,616	3,264x2,448	3,264x2,448	3,264x2,448	3,264x2,448
Viewfinder		Electronic (115,000 pixels)	Electronic (235,000 pixels)	Electronic (237,000 pixels)	Electronic (235,000 pixels)	Electronic (235,000 pixels)	Electronic (235,000 pixels)
LCD screen		1.8" (115,000 pixels)	1.8" (118,000 pixels)	2½" (115,000 pixels)	1.8" (134,000 pixels)	2" (235,000 pixels)	3½" (235,000 pixels)
Secondary screen		None	None	None	Back-lit passive LCD	None	1.4" colour LCD (115,000 pixels)
Lens mount		Fixed	Fixed	Fixed	Fixed	Fixed	Fixed
Optical zoom (35mm-equivalent)		12x (36-432mm)	10.7x (28-300mm)	5.8x (24-140mm)	10x (35-350mm)	12x (35-420mm)	15x (28-420mm)
Image stabilisation		Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
Digital zoom		4x	2x	2x	4x	4x	4x
Shutter speed		15 to 1/3,200 seconds	30 to 1/4,000 seconds	16 to 1/4,000 seconds	8 to 1/3,000 seconds	60 to 1/3,000 seconds	15 to 1/4,000 seconds
Aperture range (wide angle)		f/2.7 to f/8	f/2.8 to f/11	f/2.8 to f/8	f/2.8 to f/8	f/2.8 to f/11	f/2.2 to f/8
Closest macro focus		0cm	1cm	5cm	3cm	5cm	3cm
ISO range		50 to 400	80 to 1,600	50 to 400 (1,600 at 0.8 megapixels)	50 to 400	80 to 400	50 to 400
Maximum movie quality		640x480 at 30fps	640x480 at 30fps	640x480 at 30fps	640x480 at 30fps	640x480 at 30fps	640x480 at 30fps
File formats (still; movie)		JPEG; AVI (M-JPEG)	JPEG, RAW; AVI (M-JPEG)	JPEG, TIFF, RAW; QuickTime (M-JPEG)	JPEG, TIFF, RAW; QuickTime (M-JPEG)	JPEG, TIFF, RAW; QuickTime (M-JPEG)	JPEG, TIFF, RAW (DNG); AVI (M-JPEG)
Memory type (supplied)		SD slot (16MB SD card)	CompactFlash and xD slots (16MB xD card)	SD/MMC slot (30MB internal)	CompactFlash slot	SD/MMC slot (16MB card)	CompactFlash slot (64MB card)
Power		4x AA	4x AA	3.7V, 1,800mAh li-ion battery	7.4V, 1,100mAh li-ion battery	7.2V, 710mAh li-ion battery	7.4V, 1,900mAh li-ion battery
Battery life (shots at 30s intervals)		390	218	491	280	317	532
FEATURES							
Focus modes		Auto, Continuous, Macro, Manual	Auto, Continuous, Macro, Manual	Auto, Infinity, Macro, Manual	Auto, Continuous, Infinity, Macro, Manual	Auto, Continuous, Macro, Manual	Auto, Macro, Super Macro, Manual
Auto-focus modes		Multi, Spot	Multi, Centre	Multi, Spot	Multi, Spot	Multi, Spot	Multi, Centre, Spot
Metering		Multi, Centre-weighted, Centre, Spot, AF area	Multi, Centre-weighted, Spot	Multi, Centre-weighted, Centre, Spot, AF area	Multi, Centre-weighted, Spot, Spot, AF area	Multi, Centre-weighted, Spot	Multi, Centre-weighted, Spot
Exposure compensation		+/-2 EV	+/-2 EV	+/-2 EV	+/-2 EV	+/-2 EV	+/-2 EV
Flash modes		Auto, Red-eye Reduction, On, Off, Slow Sync, Rear Curtain Sync	Auto, Red-eye Reduction, On, Off, Slow Sync	Auto, Red-eye Reduction, On, Off, Slow Sync	Auto, Red-eye Reduction, On, Off, Slow Sync, Rear Curtain Sync	Auto, Red-eye Reduction, On, Off, Slow Sync	Auto, Red-eye Reduction, On, Off, Slow Sync, Rear Curtain Sync
Drive modes		Single, Continuous (2.4fps), Self Timer (2s, 10s)	Single, Continuous (2fps for 4 shots), Self Timer (2s, 10s)	Single, Continuous (2fps for 12 shots), Self Timer (2s, 10s)	Single, Continuous (2.3fps for five shots), Self Timer (3s, 10s)	Single, Continuous (2fps), Self Timer (2s, 10s)	Single, Continuous (1fps), Continuous HS (2.5fps), Continuous UHS (10fps at 1-megapixel), Self Timer (2s, 10s)
Priority modes		Program, Shutter Priority, Aperture Priority, Manual	Program, Shutter Priority, Aperture Priority, Manual, Bulb	Program, Shutter Priority, Aperture Priority, Manual	Program, Shutter Priority, Aperture Priority, Manual, Bulb	Program, Shutter Priority, Aperture Priority, Manual, Bulb	Program, Shutter Priority, Aperture Priority, Manual
External flash options		No	Hot shoe, PC sync	Hot shoe	Hot shoe	Hot shoe	Hot shoe
Connectivity		USB Hi-Speed	USB Hi-Speed	USB	USB Hi-Speed	USB	USB Hi-Speed
Weight (without card/battery)		405g	645g	500g	600g	674g	870g
Dimensions (HxWxD)		78x113x76mm	93x128x129mm	97x116x92mm	85x116x121mm	86x141x138mm	87x136x145mm
BUYING INFORMATION							
Price including VAT		£282	£361	£317	£556	£359	£447
Supplier		www.amazon.co.uk	www.savastore.com	www.amazon.co.uk	www.microwarehouse.co.uk	www.amazon.co.uk	http://uk.insight.com
Details		www.canon.co.uk	www.fujifilm.co.uk	www.kodak.co.uk	www.nikon.co.uk	www.panasonic.co.uk	www.samsungcamera.co.uk
Part code		9883A007AA	N077070A	8079972	VAA280BA	DMCFZ30EG	8801089758514

SLR Cameras

MANUFACTURER		CANON	NIKON	NIKON	OLYMPUS	OLYMPUS	PENTAX
Model		EOS 350D	D50 Kit	D70s Kit	E-330	E-500	*ist DL Kit
Rating		★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★
Effective number of pixels		8.0 million	6.1 million	6.1 million	7.5 million	8.0 million	6.1 million
Maximum image resolution		3,456x2,304	3,008x2,000	3,008x2,000	3,136x2,352	3,264x2,448	3,008x2,008
Viewfinder		Optical TTL	Optical TTL	Optical TTL	Optical TTL	Optical TTL	Optical TTL
LCD screen		1.8" (115,000 pixels)	2" (130,000 pixels)	2" (130,000 pixels)	2½" (215,000 pixels)	2½" (215,000 pixels)	2½" (210,000 pixels)
Secondary screen		Back-lit passive LCD	Passive LCD	Back-lit passive LCD	None	None	Passive LCD
Lens mount		Canon EF/EF-S	Nikon F Mount	Nikon F Mount	FourThirds	FourThirds	Pentax KAF
Optical zoom (35mm-equivalent)		3x (18-55mm)	3x (18-55mm)	3.8x (18-70mm)	3.2x (14-45mm)	3.2x (14-45mm)	3x (18-55mm)
Shutter speed		30 to 1/4,000 seconds	30 to 1/4,000 seconds	30 to 1/4,000 seconds	60 to 1/4,000 seconds	60 to 1/4,000 seconds	30 to 1/4,000 seconds
Aperture range (wide angle)		f/3.5 to f/22	f/3.5 to f/22	f/3.5 to f/22	f/3.5 to f/22	f/3.5 to f/22	f/3.5 to f/22
Closest macro focus		28cm	28cm	38cm	38cm	38cm	25cm
ISO range		100 to 1,600	200 to 1,600	200 to 1,600	100 to 1,600	100 to 1,600	200 to 3,200
Maximum movie quality		N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
File formats (still; movie)		JPEG, RAW; no movie mode	JPEG, RAW; no movie mode	JPEG, RAW; no movie mode	JPEG, TIFF, RAW; no movie mode	JPEG, TIFF, RAW; no movie mode	JPEG, RAW; no movie mode
Memory type (supplied)		CompactFlash slot	SD slot	CompactFlash slot	CompactFlash and xD slots	CompactFlash and xD slots	SD slot
Power		7.4V, 720mAh li-ion battery	7.4V, 1,400mAh li-ion battery	7.4V, 1,500mAh li-ion battery	7.2V, 1,500mAh li-ion battery	7.2V, 1,500mAh li-ion battery	4x AA
Battery life (shots at 30s intervals)		651	523	550	496	917	443
FEATURES							
Focus modes		Auto, Continuous, Macro, Manual	Auto, Continuous, Macro, Manual	Auto, Continuous, Macro, Manual	Auto, Continuous, Macro, Manual	Auto, Continuous, Macro, Manual	Auto, Continuous, Macro, Manual
Auto-focus modes		Multi, Spot	Multi, Spot, Closest subject	Multi, Spot	Multi, Spot	Multi, Spot	Multi, Centre
Metering		Multi, Centre-weighted, Centre	Multi, Centre-weighted, Spot	Multi, Centre-weighted, Spot	Multi, Centre-weighted, Spot, Highlight-based Spot, Shadow-based Spot	Multi, Centre-weighted, Spot, Highlight-based Spot, Shadow-based Spot	Multi, Centre-weighted, Spot
Exposure compensation		+/-2 EV	+/-5 EV	+/-5 EV	+/-5 EV	+/-5 EV	+/-3 EV
Flash modes		Auto, Red-eye Reduction, On, Off	Auto, Red-eye Reduction, On, off, Slow Sync, Rear Curtain Sync	Auto, Red-eye Reduction, On, Off, Slow Sync, Rear Curtain Sync	Auto, Red-eye Reduction, On, Off, Slow Sync, Rear Curtain Sync	Auto, Red-eye Reduction, On, Off, Slow Sync, Rear Curtain Sync	Auto, Red-eye Reduction, On, Off, Slow Sync, Rear Curtain Sync
Drive modes		Single, Continuous (14 shots at 3fps), Self Timer (2s, 10s)	Single, Continuous (2.5fps), Self Timer (2s, 5s, 10s, 20s)	Single, Continuous (3fps), Self Timer (2s, 10s)	Single, Continuous (four shots at 4fps), Self Timer (2s, 12s)	Single, Continuous (four shots at 4fps), Self Timer (2s, 12s)	Single, Continuous (2.8fps), Self Timer (2s, 12s)
Priority modes		Program, Shutter Priority, Aperture Priority, Manual	Program, Shutter Priority, Aperture Priority, Manual, Bulb	Program, Shutter Priority, Aperture Priority, Manual, Bulb	Program, Shutter Priority, Aperture Priority, Manual, Bulb	Program, Shutter Priority, Aperture Priority, Manual, Bulb	Program, Shutter Priority, Aperture Priority, Manual, Bulb
External flash options		Hot shoe	Hot shoe	Hot shoe	Hot shoe	Hot shoe	Hot shoe
Connectivity		USB Hi-Speed	USB Hi-Speed	USB	USB	USB	USB Hi-Speed
Weight (without card/battery)		724g	828g	1120g	906g	814g	818g
Dimensions (HxWxD)		94x126x64mm	102x133x76mm	111x140x78mm	87x140x72mm	95x130x66mm	92x125x67mm
BUYING INFORMATION							
Price including VAT		£496	£423	£699	£741	£518	£529
Supplier		www.amazon.co.uk	www.savastore.com	www.savastore.com	www.morecomputers.co.uk	www.morecomputers.co.uk	www.empiredirect.co.uk
Details		www.canon.co.uk	www.nikon.co.uk	www.nikon.co.uk	www.olympus.co.uk	www.olympus.co.uk	www.pentax.co.uk
Part code		02108014AA	D50SKIT1	D70SKIT1	006013	004255	18428

Labs Verdict Digital cameras

There are plenty of interesting cameras among the 12 in this group, but three stand out as particularly impressive.

The main advantage of a high-end fixed-lens camera is its telephoto zoom. Panasonic's DMC-FZ30 has a 12x zoom and highly effective image stabilisation, and produces great images. Its tactile manual controls and superb price mean it's the best fixed-lens camera. It gets a Best Buy award.

Picking our favourite digital SLR camera was harder. The price of Nikon's D50 has steadily fallen so that it's now tantalisingly low and there's barely anything to criticise about it. For flattering skin tones and low noise, it's the best camera here. However, Canon's EOS 350D won us over. It's a little more expensive, but its 8-megapixel sensor records photos with stunning detail. It's extremely fast and satisfying to use and gives



Compact Digital Camera
Panasonic DMC-FZ30
★★★★



Digital SLR Camera
Canon EOS 350D
★★★★

exceptional image quality. All this adds up to a camera we can imagine being very pleased with for many years to come. It's our Best Buy digital SLR. **CB**